



Behar/Bechukosai – See the Beauty in the Apples

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“But despite all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not despise them nor will I reject them to annihilate them, thereby breaking My covenant that is with them, for I am the Lord their God. I will remember for them the covenant [made with] the ancestors, whom I took out from the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be a God to them. I am the Lord.”
(Vayikra 26:44-45)

They are difficult words to read. In the second of the two parshios we read this week, we are told in great detail of the chilling series of curses and punishments known as the *Tochecha* (rebuke). God tells us that if we do not follow His laws and walk in His ways; if we forsake the tradition of our ancestors and forget all He has done for us, there will be repercussions. Yet, God says that despite it all, He will never forget us. He will never forget the covenant He made with our ancestors. No matter what we do, no matter how tarnished or tainted we may become – God will not reject us, God will not forget us. The very verses which highlight the punitive measures God will take to remedy our disobedience, simultaneously highlight the immeasurable love God has for us. The Midrash writes, that in the same way that God does not forget about us, we must never forget about each other. When my fellow Jew falls into dire straits, I must rise up to help; I must remember the social covenant we have with one another to help, aid, and ameliorate the pain and suffering of the other.

There is a story told about the great Chassidic master, Rav Chaim of Sanz, known as the Divrei Chaim (1793-1876). It was a few hours before Shabbos, and there was a knock on the Rebbe's door. Rav Chaim opened the door and saw a woman whom he recognized from the community. This woman's story was an unfortunate one. She was widowed at a young age and left with the responsibility of raising and providing for her young children. She came to the Rebbe and explained that she did not have enough money to purchase food for Shabbos. The Rebbe asked, *“But don't you have a produce cart in the marketplace from which you sell apples?”* The widow replied, *“Yes, Rebbe – I do have an apple cart but the town's people say that my apples are not good, and as a result, most people don't even bother to stop and look at my produce.”* The Rebbe quickly grabbed his hat, coat, and walking stick and asked the widow to please follow him to the marketplace. When he reached her cart, he lifted one of the apples and called out, *“Yidden (Jews), who would like to buy fresh, delicious apples?”* A hush descended upon the marketplace – who ever saw such a thing? The great Divrei Chaim was selling apples! The people quickly rushed to the cart eager to buy the apples the Rebbe recommended. The supply was quickly exhausted and potential customers began to bid against one another for the last remaining few. Within a matter of minutes, the apples were sold out and the widow had enough money for Shabbos and then some. As the customers dispersed, the Divrei Chaim turned to the young widow and said, *“You see, your apples are wonderful – the people just didn't know it.”*

There is an important lesson to be learned from this story. The Divrei Chaim could have easily given the widow some money to help with her Shabbos needs. He didn't need go to the marketplace and sell the widow's apples. But the Rebbe understood that it wasn't just that she was impoverished; it was clear to him from the way she spoke about her apples and about her life that she felt defeated. In front of him, the Rebbe saw a woman who had been dealt a difficult lot. When she was first widowed, people probably showered her with help and attention. But life moves on, and we forget. They forgot about her – to the point that they wouldn't even patronize her stand (even if the apples weren't great, it would have been an opportunity to support a widow and orphans). It wasn't just about providing her with food for Shabbos. The Rebbe felt he had an opportunity to lift her up, rehabilitate her sense of self, and show her that even the great Divrei Chaim cares about her and her plight. The only thing worse than suffering – is suffering alone. The Rebbe had the opportunity to make this woman feel that she was remembered.

Often when there is a crisis or a particular need arises, we are there to answer the call. When someone we know has endured loss or suffered a tragic set-back, we are determined to help in any way we can. But as time goes on, we move on and we forget. Not because we no longer care, it is just that we get busy with life. We must remember not to forget the other. God reminds us that He will never forget us. ***No matter how compromised or spiritually unrecognizable we become – He will always hold our hand. The only thing He asks in return is that we do the same for one another.***
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